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GEOGRAPHIC INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/RR GM 63-I
February 1963

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO JANUARY 1963

(Revision of CIA/RR GM 60-3, 30 September 1960)



DOCUMENT NO. 1
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
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CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 30/8/77
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 30/8/77 REVIEWER: 035377

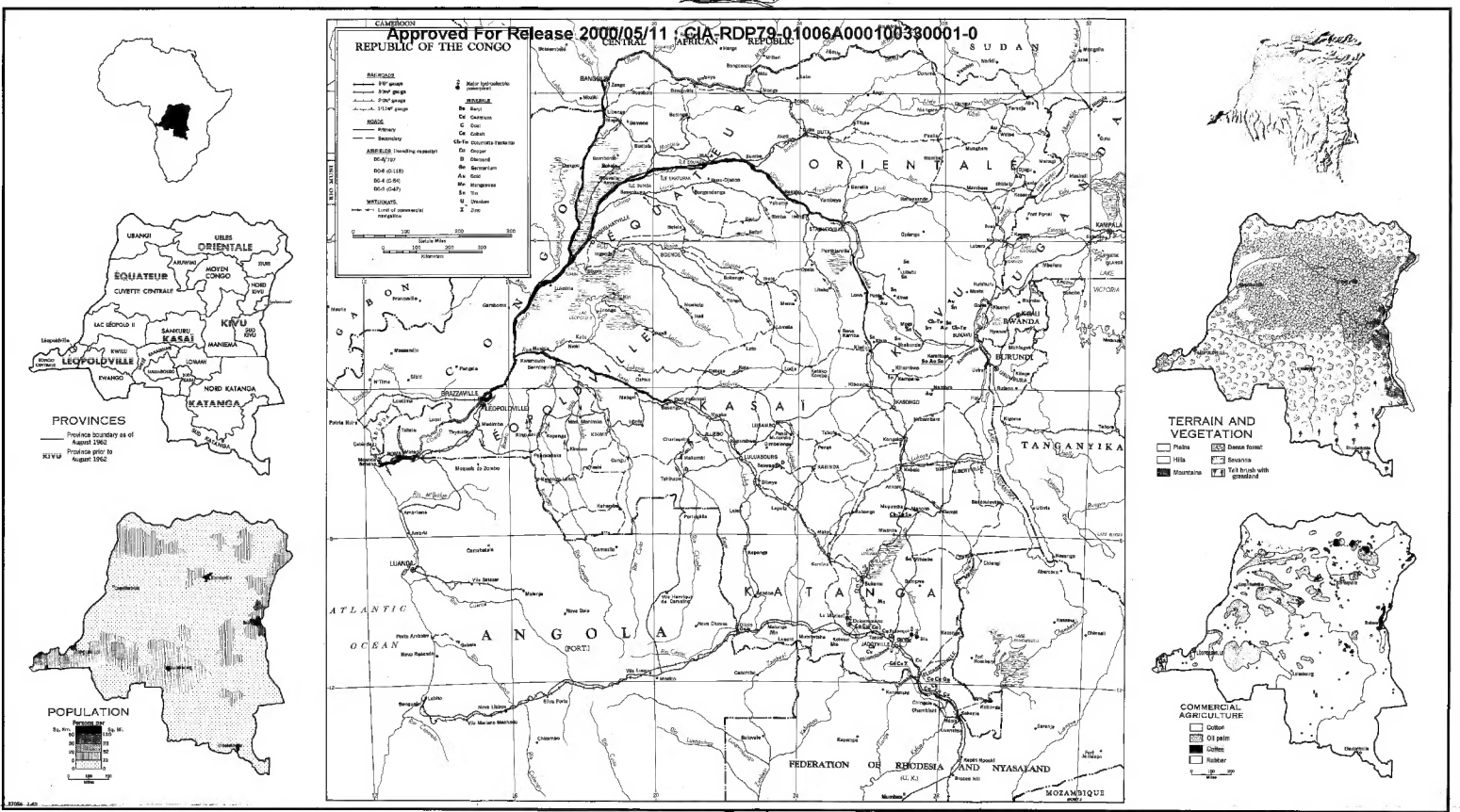
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO—JANUARY 1963

The growth of the Republic of the Congo has been handicapped by the lack of cultural and physical elements that are conducive to the formation of a national consciousness. The virtually landlocked republic is almost coterminous with the Congo River Basin, but the underlying influence of the river system is limited by the great distances that it spans and the numerous unswinging stretches that interrupt river traffic. Unification is further retarded by the existence of a highly diverse and unevenly distributed population that consistently places sectional interests above those of national solidarity. Most of the population is still engaged in subsistence agriculture, and the available manpower with administrative and technical skills falls far short of meeting the needs of a developing nation. The Congo has both the agricultural and mineral resources that are required to sustain a viable economy, but regional cooperation must be attained before real progress is achieved. The mineral-rich Katanga, an important element in the economic stabilization of the Congo, is culturally and economically isolated from the rest of the republic and will have separatist tendencies even after the present crisis eases.

Physical Setting

The Republic of the Congo lies astride the equator on the tableland of central Africa and slopes westward from the interrupted chain of mountains that flank the African Rift Valley. From heights of 6,000 feet or more on the east, elevations drop rapidly toward the west, and except for the hilly sections of eastern and central Katanga, practically all of the republic lies below 3,000 feet. Virtually all of the land is drained westward by the Congo River system. The Congo River flows almost to the sea before it drops to an elevation of 600 feet. In the big bend of the river west of Pointe-Noire and Brazzaville, elevations are generally below 1,000 feet, relief is negligible, the rivers meander, and swamps abound. This section is the heart of the dense forests of broadleaved evergreens. Where a dry season is firmly established on the northern and southern margins of this section, the dense forest gives way to open savanna that in turn gives way farther south to predominantly grass-covered plains and uplands. In the southeastern half of the former Katanga Province the grasslands is mixed with tall scrub or thorn forest.

The typical monotonous climate of the tropics prevails throughout the Congo, but latitude and altitude introduce discernible variations. Only the area within 3 or 4 degrees south and south of the equator is without some dry weather. Dry seasons occur in the extreme north (December through February) and in the south (May through October). Annual rainfall is not high for the tropics -- 70 inches in the north and 70 inches in the south. Daily average temperatures generally reach the high 80's or low 90's, except in the eastern highlands, where both temperature and humidity are lower.

The Congo is endowed with resources that could be made to support a sound and fairly well-rounded economy. The scarce mineral wealth, largely in the Katanga (50 percent) but also in Kivu (10 percent), Kasai (5 percent), and Orientale (4 percent) regions normally accounts for 20 percent of the gross national product and 60 percent of the value of all exports. The combination of large and fairly constant river flow and easy drops in water level provides great opportunity for the development of hydroelectric power. The Congo is reputed to have a technical potential for about 60,000 megawatts of hydroelectric generating capacity -- about 13 percent of the estimated world total -- but to date, only the nearest fraction of this amount, or about 700 megawatts, has been installed. Coal is of minor and decreasing importance.

Environmental conditions permit a variety of economic activities, most of which are adaptable to either small-scale or large-scale operations. The tropical rain forest of the central and lower Congo Basin is a vast of commercial timber that covers 394,000 square miles, or 43 percent of the country. Locally, the smaller timber stands on the savanna and bushland are used extensively. Food crops for local use are grown almost everywhere. Both commercial plantings that thrive on continuous culture and those that require a dry season can be accommodated, but areas in the dense forest require more clearing and their soils generally more deterioration than areas in the savanna. Commercial fishing in the lakes and rivers, which still is inadequate for local needs but is expanding, amounts to more than 20 pounds per person per year. Unrecorded native fishing and hunting probably provide a considerable amount of food. In eastern Kivu, Parc National Albert offers 3,400 square miles of spectacular natural attractions for the development of a tourist industry.

Population

The 14 million people of the Congo are distributed unevenly over about 900,000 square miles, an area approximately equal to that of the United States east of the Mississippi River. At the time the Congo became independent, approximately two-thirds of the African population was engaged in subsistence agriculture. The remainder -- 4 million to 5 million persons, including dependents -- had been drawn into the labor markets of the mines, plantations, and larger cities. In 1960, only one-fourth of the population lived in urban areas. The insecurity of rural areas and the general decline of commercial agriculture since independence, however, have increased the flow of people to the city. Once in the city, these new arrivals swell the very large numbers of unskilled workers for whom jobs are not available and for whom food must be provided.

Six months before the Congo became independent, the European population -- around 300,000 -- numbered approximately 115,000, or less than 1 percent of the total population. About 50,000 of the Europeans were engaged in commerce and industry in the Leopoldville area or in the Katanga, another 50,000 were independent agriculturalists who were concentrated in eastern Kivu, and 10,000 were civil servants assigned to various posts in the colonial government. Six months after independence only 25,000 Europeans remained. Toward the end of 1960 the greatly reduced teachers, technicians, advisors, and merchants were slowly returning to many areas. The white farmers are not returning. Currently, the European population of the Congo is estimated to be 50,000, including United Nations personnel.

Cultural heterogeneity is one of the underlying causes of much of the unrest in the Congo. As in many of the new countries of Africa, the population of the Congo is divided by regional conflicts that are influenced by the various local interests of more than 200 ethnic groupings. The problem is acute because of the size of the country and the variety of interests represented. Under the colonial administration the tribes as such were designated, but tribal associations were perpetuated through cultural societies. As the Congo approached independence, these societies blossomed into active political parties such as Kasavubu's ABAKO (Alliance des Bakongo) and Tshombe's ACONAK (Confederation des Associations de Natives). In most cases these parties attracted followings comprised of people who were concerned less with racial ethnic groups and traditional enemies than with administrative authority. At most, the parties could be considered to have no more than provincial scope. National parties or mass organizations on a national level did not exist. When the colonial administration collapsed, 10 parties assumed control of individual regions and sent their own regionally oriented representatives to the National Chamber of Deputies. Although a number of the original 10 influential parties are no longer active, regional interests are still dominant, and no truly national parties have arisen.

The six provinces that the new Republic of the Congo inherited from the Belgian Congo in 1960 had been established for the administrative convenience of the colonial government. In August 1960, they were replaced by 20 provinces that were created primarily along the lines of tribal groupings. Because each of the new provinces represents a relatively homogeneous population under local leadership, the hope has been expressed that provincial administration now will be simplified, and the cause of national unity will be strengthened. It appears, however, that the leaders in the new provinces have no more feeling for national goals than the tribal leaders had in the past. The new provincial governments have evinced little interest in problems of the central government and appear to be particularly irresponsible in economic matters.

Economy

The economy of the Congo is unusual for an underdeveloped country. When it achieved independence, its assets included a well-developed and profitably operated minerals complex, a system of commercial agriculture that produced revenue equal to about one-third of the total value of all exports, expanding modern light industry in the former Leopoldville and Katanga Provinces, and an integrated river and rail transport system. These assets were managed from Antwerp and Brussels and were closely coordinated with the colonial administration. An estimated 85 percent of the commercial activity of the Congo is still controlled by foreign firms, but little coordination with the central government is apparent.

In 1959 the minerals and metallurgical industries accounted for 62 percent of the total value of all exports, although these same industries employed only 10 percent of the wage-earning labor force. During 1954-55 the Congo produced 72 percent of the world's industrial diamonds, 69 percent of the cobalt (nine basis), 30 percent of the germanium, 10 percent of the tin (nine basis), and 7 percent of the copper. Copper from the Katanga was the largest single source of foreign exchange. The bulk of the minerals listed have been exported from the Katanga have always been carried by rail to the Portuguese ports of Lobito in Angola and Beira in Mozambique, in preference to using the costly internal rail-and-water route to the port of Matadi within the Congo.

As of 1959 the agricultural sector of the economy provided 38 percent of the total value of all exports -- primarily palm oil, coffee, cotton, and rubber -- and employed almost three times as many wage earners as the metals industries employed. Palm oil, the most significant agricultural export, accounted for more than 25 percent of the world's supply. Subsistence farming, chiefly the cultivation of manioc, plantains, maize, and rice, continues to occupy the majority of the Congolese. In spite of the notable deficiency of protein in the diet and the relatively large areas suitable for raising cattle, the Congo has fewer cattle proportionally than neighboring countries.

The productive elements of the Congolese economy have suffered relatively little in view of the chaos surrounding the first 30 months of independence. Except for the recent sabotage of bridges and power lines in the Katanga, the industrial complex has remained intact, and the production of minerals has continued at a favorable rate through 1962. Destruction of rail bridges has reduced the flexibility of rail service and will stop service through Lubumbashi to Port-Francqui for a period of 3 to 6 months, but it has not isolated Lubumbashi or Elisabethville from export routes through Angola or Mozambique. The total economy, however, has suffered greatly because of the fragmentation of the country and the almost total lack of effective administrative authority on the part of the central government.

Inflation, serious unemployment, administrative chaos, and shortages of capital plague the Congo. Before independence, much of the wealth that was created by the minerals industries found its way into the treasury of the Congo Government through direct taxes, export duties, and profit-sharing arrangements. Since independence, these revenues have not been collected systematically by the central government. Although river transport facilities are still relatively intact, road transportation is seriously disrupted. Trucks that once hauled agricultural products from producing areas to the coast have broken down, and many of the roads on which they traveled are beginning to roll are considered to be unserviceable for most of the year. Disruption of transport and uncertainty about protective security measures have driven out many European plantation owners as well as many of the Greek and Portuguese traders who played an important role in the agricultural economy of the former Orientale and Kivu Provinces. Without the Europeans to provide direction and employment and without the traders to purchase the products and sell the necessities, many African farmers who had produced only on a limited commercial scale have reverted to a subsistence level or have abandoned agriculture altogether. The traders are returning, but they may not remain long if local business conditions continue to remain depressed. Shortages of all kinds make life particularly difficult for the wage-earning city dweller.

Rejuvenation of the economy will be heavily dependent on regional cooperation, particularly the integration of the Katanga into the country as a whole. Under colonial rule the regional economies were never integrated, and the Katanga in particular has moved away from the rest of the Congo in both economic and cultural affairs. In terms of raw materials, power, labor, managerial skills, markets, and transportation, the Katanga functions without assistance from the north. Many of these assets are closely related to the industries in Northern Rhodesia. Power is produced back and forth across the border in time or peak demand, rail service between the Katanga and Northern Rhodesia is coordinated, and spare parts for equipment are often supplied through Rhodesia.

The way of life in the Katanga resembles that in industrialized areas of the Rhodesias more closely than it resembles that of any other area of the Congo. This similarity stems from the way in which the minerals complex is operated and the favored economic position of European technicians and managers in the community. The settlement of current problems will not greatly alter the tendency of the Katanga to remain isolated from the remainder of the nation. The African population does not care about the problems of the central government and will remain indifferent until a national consciousness develops. The outlook of the European population will continue to be similar in many respects to that of the white population of central and southern Africa.

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Analysts: [REDACTED]

Approved For Release 2000/05/11 : CIA-RDP79-01006A000100330001-0 (Project 62.2118)

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CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS SCS
 NEXT REVIEW DATE: 1999
 AUTH: HR 70-2
 DATE: 2/26/99

CIA-RDP79-01006A000100330001-0

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